

## Some Interesting Coleoptera from North-East Essex

By DAVID R. NASH\*

The areas in the immediate vicinity of Colchester, Brightlingsea, Clacton and Frinton appear to have been relatively well-worked for beetles, but few modern records of Coleoptera seem to have been published for the extreme north-eastern tip of Essex. Although I have not collected in this area at all seriously, since my chief interest centres upon the faunas of Suffolk and Wiltshire, the following notes upon some of the more interesting Coleoptera taken in this under-recorded part of the county over the last few years may be worth placing on record. Whenever possible, National Grid references are given. Nomenclature for the Carabid subgenus *Ophonus* follows Lindroth (1974).

### CARABIDAE

*Cychrus caraboides* (L.): one specimen found among rubbish in a sandy pit in a rough field beside Hall Lane, Harwich, 28.v.68 and another under a stone nearby, 22.vi.68 (TM 241308); one under a rotting log by a stream near Cox's Hill, Lawford, 7.vii.68 (TM 093317). A generally distributed but never common species.

*Leistus rufomarginatus* Duft.: a single example taken running among *Urtica dioica* L. growing beside a lane near the Harwich Comprehensive School, 12.vi.72 (TM 242306). This recent immigrant was first recorded in this country by Crowson (1942) from Kent, but no further specimens were taken until 1953, when it was discovered in Suffolk by Gilbert (1954). Since this latter date, the insect has proceeded to establish itself extremely successfully. Up to the present time, the beetle has been recorded from about a dozen counties and it appears to be spreading steadily westwards from its initial foothold in S.E. England. The species was originally recorded for Essex by Hammond (1968) who reported its occurrence in three localities in the south of the county.

*Chlaenius nigricornis* (F.): a single specimen of this local species was brought to me having been found close to the Harwich Comprehensive School in the spring of 1968.

*Badister sodalis* (Duft.): one example of this locally distributed insect was found near the estuary of the River Stour at Wrabness, 22.v.68.

*Harpalus rubripes* (Duft.): a male and female of this somewhat local insect from under stones in the Essex Naturalists' Trust's gravel pits at Great Holland, 20.iv.72 (TM 203195).

*Pristonychus terricola* (Herbst): two specimens were brought to me in May, 1968 having been found in a butcher's cellar in

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Harwich where, apparently, the beetles were common. I have not taken the insect out-of-doors in Essex. Lindroth (1974, p. 79) considers the species rather rare, although this has not been my experience in Suffolk and Norfolk where I have found it both indoors and outside in several localities over the past few years.

*Agonum marginatum* (L.): found commonly under wood and debris beside a rubbish-filled pool on a refuse tip near the harbour, Bathside, Harwich, 17.vi.71 (TM 256323). This habitat has now been almost totally destroyed. Although usually stated to be a common species (*vide* Lindroth, *ibid*, p. 82), neither I myself nor my friend Mr. C. Barham have found this to be the case and it appears to be recorded from only four localities (all coastal) in Suffolk. (Mr. Barham has a single Essex record — one example beside a pond at Bures Hamlet, 25.vi.74.)

*Brachinus crepitans* (L.): one example from under a piece of card near Parkeston Quay, Harwich, 17.v.72 (TM 236321). Recorded at the same time from surrounding rubbish were *Harpalus* (O.) *rufibarbis* F. (= *subpunctatus* Steph.; *seladon* Schauburger), *Amara aenea* (Dg.), *A. lucida* (Duft.), and *A. apricaria* (Pk.). The presence of *Brachinus* in this locality was brought to my attention by a schoolgirl who showed me about half a dozen specimens which she had found the previous autumn. Apparently (as is often the case once this local species is found), the beetles were very common at that time quite close to the spot where I found my single specimen.

#### TROGOSITIDAE

*Tenebroides mauritanicus* (L.): one dead example of this cosmopolitan stored products species was found in a cupboard containing bran, corn, and pony pellets at the Harwich Comprehensive School, 16.xi.71. Also found in the same cupboard, 9.ix.71, were the following more common stored products species — *Calandra granaria* (L.), *Ptinus tectus* (Boield.) (common in bran), and *Stegobium paniceum* (L.) (abundant in pony pellets).

#### COCCINELLIDAE

*Harmonia quadripunctata* (Pont.): two examples of this comparatively recent addition to our Coleopterous fauna were found hibernating under the loose bark of a post fencing a small isolated plantation of immature Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris* L.) at Mistley, 23.ii.70 (TM 120310). First recorded in Britain from Blythburgh in Suffolk in 1939 (Morley, 1941), I have found this conspicuous Ladybird to be common in several localities in E. Suffolk, whilst Mr. Barham has also found it equally common in the Norfolk pine woods.

#### MYCETOPHAGIDAE

*Litargus connexus* (Geoff.): a single specimen of this local species was found beneath the loose bark of a standing, dead, Beech (*Fagus*) on Cox's Hill, Lawford, 16.ii.75 (TM 093314). Also present were several examples of *Aridius bifasciatus* (Reitt.) and *Rhinosinus planirostris* (F.), *Tetratoma fungorum*

(F.) (singly), and hibernating *Adalia bipunctata* (L.).

*Mycetophagus piceus* (F.): one example of this scarce\* Mycetophagid was found in the mould-impregnated wood of a prostrate, red-rotten Oak trunk near Dairy House, Mistley, 26.xii.74 (TM 112313). This locality is merely a small strip of woodland which contains among its predominantly younger age-class trees, a few older trees which are the remnants of the older woodland which once covered the area. Although recorded from macrofungi, this species unlike most other British members of the genus, appears to be found much more commonly in the rotten wood of old decayed Oaks. It seems often to be recorded with the Anobiids *Dorcatoma chrysomelina* Sturm and/or *D. flavicornis* (F.) (vide Ash, 1924; Moore, 1957b), presumably because the state of decay of the wood required for the latter species to develop successfully, is often brought about by the growth of the moulds and fungi upon which the Mycetophagid feeds. (Skidmore and Johnson (1969) found *M. piceus* in the red, rotting wood of a dying Oak previously attacked by the fungus *Laetiporus* (= *Polyporus*) *sulphureus*. Searching the same tree two years later they found larvae of *D. flavicornis*, but could no longer find any trace of *M. piceus*.)

#### TENEBRIONIDAE

*Blaps mucronata* Latr.: one example of this species was given to me which had been found crawling along a road in Harwich, 6.xi.68. Recently, it was suggested (Brunt and Collins, 1970) that this beetle was becoming increasingly uncommon. Both Mr. A. A. Allen (1971) and myself (Nash, 1973) have published evidence supporting the view that although the insect is perhaps becoming scarcer inside buildings because of improved standards of cleanliness, it seems able to adapt itself quite efficiently to living in the open.

*Helops caeruleus* (L.): larvae and adults found abundantly in several dead Willows (*Salix? fragilis* L.) in meadows beside the estuary of the River Stour at Wrabness, 26.v.68 and 29.v.69 (TM 166315). I have been told that the species occurs in a Harwich garden but have only seen a drawing (clearly representing this species) as evidence. Fowler (1891) records this very local insect from nearby Clacton and other Essex localities. Recently (Buck, 1971), it has been found only a few miles farther down the coast on the Essex Naturalists' Trust's reserve at Fingringhoe Wick. In Suffolk, the beetle appears to be very much scarcer and I know of only three localities.

#### MELOIDAE

*Meloe proscarabaeus* L.: a single male was found crawling up the outside wall of a classroom at the Harwich Compre-

\* In my experience this is hardly a scarce species (in the sense that *M. populi* F., for example, is truly scarce)—except insofar as it is restricted by its special habitat, which I have always found to be solely as described by Mr. Nash. In such situations it is not uncommon in (e.g) the New and Windsor Forests. — A.A.A.

hensive School, 13.v.70. There was a narrow grassy border around the base of the wall, and flowerbeds nearby, but no sign of any species of Solitary Bees in whose nest the beetle could have developed. Subsequent observation failed to reveal further specimens or evidence of suitable hosts — a most curious record. This very local species, like the other most frequently encountered British member of the genus, *violaceus* Marsh., appears to have become even scarcer in recent years, most probably as a result of destruction of habitat. *M. proscarabaeus* is also recorded by Buck (1971) from Fingringhoe Wick. I have found *proscarabaeus* in only one Suffolk locality (in the early 1960's) and this habitat has since been destroyed as a result of building activities. I have searched the near vicinity for this colony but without success.

#### CERAMBYCIDAE

*Prionus coriarius* (L.): a single example of this spectacular insect was found crawling near an old stump right on the edge of a private lake at Great Bromley during the mid-1960's (TM 083264). The beetle was released after examination and owing to an unfortunate oversight the exact date and sex of the specimen were not noted. Buck (1965) reported the occurrence of a female *Prionus* at light at Great Horksley and stated he was unaware of any other recent records for the Colchester area (Cumming (1959) exhibited on example taken by J. Firmin in Colchester, ix.58), nor of this species being attracted to light. I have personal light records of two females flying around the lamps of a camp at Danbury, near Chelmsford, vii.68, and also of a male which I found at a lighted shop-window near the town centre in Ipswich, Suffolk, 19.viii.62. S. E. Allen (1958) recorded nine examples at light over a period of four years at Liss in Hampshire.

#### CHRYSOMELIDAE

*Crioceris asparagi* (L.): one specimen brought to me which had been found beneath old Asparagus growing in a garden in Harwich, 3.x.71 (TM 236308). I subsequently visited the garden, but careful search yielded no further specimens. Although this insect is not generally considered to be rare, few records of its occurrence seem to be published and this is the only specimen which I possess.

*Chrysolina oricalcia* (Müll.): a single example of this local Chrysomelid found squashed on my garage floor at Lawford, 6.i.70 (TM 098310). The garage is cold and draughty and this seems an unusually early date for such a species to be active.

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NYCTEROSEA OBSTIPATA F. (THE GEM) IN SUSSEX, 1975. — Further to South's comments on this species (*Moths of the British Isles* (1961), **2**: 131) regarding the probability of early immigrants giving rise to descendants, I have been fortunate in taking three male specimens this autumn. They occurred in my experimental moth trap at this address on 26th, 31st October and 1st November. Tentatively, I believe this may lend some slight support to the possibility of generations bred in Britain in the wild, when one considers the close dates of capture combined with the same point of capture, but especially as all specimens were of the same sex. Given the sex/time/emergence link often encountered in lepidoptera, this final point is I believe statistically significant. — COLIN PRATT, "Oleander", 5, View Road, Peacehaven, Newhaven, Sussex. [The late Percy Cue found a feral *obstipata* larva in Kent in 1961 from which he reared the moth; and on one night there that year, we counted some 20 moths of both sexes at rest on rushes within the space of a few yards.—Editor.]